

UTOPIAN BULGARIAS: LITERARY PROJECTS AND POLITICS

LITERATURE AND CONSPIRACY. PART 2:

STOYAN MIHAYLOVSKI VS. PRINCE FERDINAND

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Stoyan Mihaylovski is one of the most famous Bulgarian poets and public figures in the period after the Liberation of Bulgaria. He is known for his irreparable satirical works: both publicist and artistic. As a result of his public criticism, referring mostly to the monarch of Bulgaria – Prince Ferdinand I, the so-called "Law on the Person" was adopted – it constitutes a kind of censorship of the press and allows all critics of the state apparatus, Ferdinand's persona and his family to be brought to justice. Perhaps Mihaylovski's most famous work of art is the "Book about the Bulgarian People" – satirical poetry on the essence of statecraft, bringing in (as the main principle of governance) debauchery and stimulation of ignorance in the masses in order for one to obtain longer stay in power. In this discourse, we will look at some of Mihaylovski's most burning publicist texts in order to understand his position as a moral guardian of society, but we will first briefly characterize the personality and principles he defended in order to answer the question where Stoyan Mihaylovski drew the courage from to declare his public positions so loudly and uncompromisingly.

Stoyan Mihaylovski was born in 1856 into the family of the lawyer and prominent public and cultural leader – Nikola Mihaylovski. He inherited the name of his uncle – the leader of the church-national struggle and bishop of the Constantinople patriarchy – Ilarion Makariopolski (born Stoyan Mihaylovski), famous for his participation in the struggle for an Independent Bulgarian Patriarchate from the Greek Clergy and, of course, repeatedly exiled because of this. An interesting moment in the family and Bulgarian history is that Bishop Ilarion did not mention the name of the patriarch of Constantinople in his solemn speech during the Easter Mass in 1860 and thus proved the readiness of the Bulgarians for church independence. After this audacious act, he was sent to exile once again. So far, we see the whole family of the writer Stoyan Mihaylovski was known precisely for their determination to defend admirable public positions. It is important to note Stoyan Mihaylovski continued the family tradition and while he was a teacher in Dojran (North Macedonia), he also fought against the influence of the Greek clergy. One of the most prominent cases is the interruption of the Easter word of the Greek dominion with the words "In Slavic!", he was subjected to physical punishment for. Stoyan Mihaylovski retaliated in his typical style by writing the satirical poem "To a Greek church leader who called me a godless man".

Mihaylovski himself was highly educated – he initially studied in Veliko Tarnovo; as his father was a teacher, Mihaylovski graduated from the famous French Sultan's Lycée in Istanbul, then went to France and studied law at the Aix-en-Provence University. After the Liberation of Bulgaria, he worked as a lawyer and judge, he was editor of the famous newspaper "Narodnij glas" ("People's Voice"), and he cooperated with numerous other publications and became the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After completing his education, interrupted because of the Liberation War, he held senior state positions – General Secretary at the Ministry of Justice, member of the Rousse Court of Appeal and French teacher at several high schools and at the Faculty of Law. He was also a teacher of the famous writer Kiril Hristov, who shared:

The impression on all of us was almost sinister. A poet to us still meant an ethereal being; yet Mihaylovski was too harsh, too tangible. His big fat and carefully shaved lower jaw, his French boxed beard, his shaggy moustaches, as they obscured his almost white mouth, his saggy, also shaggy eyebrows over his contemptuous blindfolded eyes, his thick hairy coat – there was something scary in everything, something not good. We no longer thought we had in front of us an Apollo son, rather a scary man we suddenly felt all the things we were being told had to be true— and who was now capable of beating us all in a row (Hristov 1999: 34, 35).

One of Mihaylovski's most advocated public positions was the struggle for autonomy of the other Bulgarian territories under the Ottoman rule – Macedonia and Edirne Thrace. He was even elected Chairman of the Supreme Macedonian-Edirne Committee to bring balance between the final courses for the development of the revolutionary work. In 1901, Mihaylovski gave a sharp speech accusing Prince Ferdinand and condemning his attempts to interfere in the Macedonian-Edirne case and the subsequent danger the organization's activities might fall into the hands of anarcho-terrorists who seriously harmed the goals set. He was elected as a member of the National Assembly in 1903 and presented his positions himself – and he defended them in the following way:

I am a passionate supporter of Christian socialism and Christian democratism – on the one hand, and... I am a hardened anti-monarchist on the other; I cannot ally myself with everything and anything with the young generation as they want a complete split between social work and Christian teaching (Kepov 1928 88-89).

In 1903 and 1904, an epic – for the Bulgarian historiography – series of critical articles by Stoyan Mihaylovski against Prince Ferdinand was published in the newspaper "Den" ("Day"). Here we are going to look at some of the most critical texts against the prince and the respective accusations.

"Prince Ferdinand's ancestors" regarded Ferdinand as an ancestral "clear-seer and cunning powerholder" (Mihaylovski 1903a), since both families he belonged to in maternal and paternal lines – Bourbons (a.k.a Orleans) and Coburgs, were presented satirically as cunning and skillful, but also newsmonger of intrigue. The purpose of the text was to question the management skills not only of the then current monarch, but of his entire genealogy, to highlight the ancestral moral decay and therefore the poor choice to be the prince of the Kingdom of Bulgaria. Such texts today would fall into the chapter "conspiracies", as Mihaylovski created a kind of literary cartoon.

Perhaps one of the most philosophical satirical texts of Stoyan Mihaylovski is "Psychophysiology of People's governing" from 1903. In Plato's style, in the form of a dialogue between a Teacher and a Priest, two logical, at times utopian but opposing views on the development of Bulgaria are presented. The priest defended the idea it was not the authorities who create the public works, and the people impose it on the authorities, while order cannot be imposed with disarray, therefore "*it's our fault... there is a common (joint) responsibility behind our common misery*", while the Teacher defended the idea greed is the only principle in our government circles because they do not abide by the basic recipe: serve the people, not – serve yourself using people and therefore: "*it's better [to have] confusion rather than breathlessness, desertion, and deadness*" (Mihaylovski 1903b:133).

Unlike most of the texts we consider in this discourse, the name of the prince was not mentioned here, but the reasons leading to the deep state crisis were considered, and therefore the text was seen as a continuation of the tradition of monarchical criticism.

"The mysteries of the Bulgarian palace" is the article providing Mihaylovski with a suspended sentence. This was indeed a dangerous article about authorities because it scandalized them in regards to certain financial matters. The case was of such great interest to the Bulgarian public there was no room in the courtroom even for the correspondents (Kapitanova 2021). It would be appropriate to consider whether this was also the real reason why Mihaylovski's conviction should ultimately remain suspended. The article itself is a satirical reading of parts of a publication about Ferdinand, published in the French magazine "Revue Franco-Americaine", but also contained ill-omened topics such as dubious government procurement, as they seemed contrary to the laws of the country:

*Prince Ferdinand bought a hunting wagon in Germany for BGN 60,000; in Istanbul and elsewhere, he gave out crosses decorated with brilliants at the cost of tens of thousands of leva; in Bavaria and elsewhere, he rented special trains to go for hikes... Who paid? The Bulgarians! Well, these Bulgarians should be able to understand when a high-ranking Bourbon pick-pockets them – he actually gives them this great honour; otherwise these louses, these rags would be able to ask such questions: **The law does not allow state purchases without an***

auction [a.k.a. procurement procedure] for more than BGN 3,000, why does the prince buy items at the cost of BGN 60,000? (italics of the author, my note – M. G.)

At the end of the article, Mihaylovski summarized the following: *"The wobbly Bulgarianness was created to fatten the wide-knit Latinness, the large-bodied Papism, the iron-handed Coburgness"* (Mihaylovski 1904a).

A continuation in the same topic of the search for responsibility/liability for the affairs of the *"constitutional sovereign"* is the article *"What does the prince do and what do we do?"*. The reason for writing it was the "hour and seventeen minutes" of train delay due to the passage of the royal "special train" on the railway line. In this seemingly petty accusation, Mihaylovski concerned far more important social issues, namely – the presence of a *special train specifically tailored for the needs of the prince*:

in Europe, rulers, such as the Saxon King, do not consider it degrading, incompatible with their rank and their attributions, to travel in ordinary trains – in a specially allocated salon. To always ride in a special train – with an Emperor August's train, according to The Bulgarian-Chinese terminology, - this shows above all that you avoid any contact with the crowds. (Mihaylovski 1904b)

Mihaylovski linked the prince's arrogant trip and comments in the newspapers to the newly passed "Law on the Person" and, aware of the danger of the operation of this same law, summarized: *"Dear sirs and rulers, here is the truth: in a simple folk phrase: "Do not do, not to be rumored!"* (Mihaylovski 1904b).

The idea of the whole law is grandiloquent and in absolute contrast to the principle every ruler makes mistakes and must be criticized and corrected "just like any reasonable human being" (Mihaylovski 1904b).

The "Letter to the Prince" is a kind of address to Prince Ferdinand on the occasion of a read "message" on behalf of His Royal Highness at the National Assembly, but it can also be interpreted as a court plea, because Mihaylovski began and ended his article with the defense of his right to criticize, and hoped he would not be held liable for that (unlike the case of "The Mysteries of the Bulgarian Palace"): *"Let me be allowed to believe a writer in Bulgaria can also give instructive words to the Head of State without being exposed to a police pursuit or a judicial chase!"* (Mihaylovski 1904c).

The letter clearly stated the legal grounds for the "message" of the prince not to be legally regarded as such and discussed the procedures such an address (or, more precisely, "speech") should have been passed to the Members of the National Assembly. The taken away opportunity for discussion of this subjective opinion of the prince was also condemned. Another important part of the letter is addressing the pseudo-party-ism (loyalty) and the worrying appointment of ministers by the prince himself, not by the Parliament, as it should be according to the law. It also explained how such appointments were contrary to the constitution and appealed for establishing a ministry of "neutral people" who would further ensure fair elections.

Stoyan Mihaylovski was aware of the danger of his texts yet remained true to the family tradition of being the protector of public justice at all costs. After his long attempts to advocacy of the public interests, Stoyan Mihaylovski left the public-political life of the country in 1905, frustrated and disappointed by the inability to defend the Supremacy of Law, political correctness, and fight by all legal means against pseudo-party-ism, pursuit of positions and political predators. Some of his most remembered words are: *"Bulgarians are not free, they have just been set free."*

The rest of his life he spent in solitude and dedicated this time to creativity.

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